



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 1, 2010

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VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN AT RISK FROM EXTREME HEAT *FUNDS AVAILABLE TO COVER UTILITY BILLS FOR ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – More Tennesseans are now eligible to get help paying their utility bills through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Legislative changes made during the 106th General Assembly expanded eligibility from 125 percent to 200 percent of poverty. That means a family of four can earn up to \$44,100 a year and be eligible for LIHEAP benefits. A network of 19 nonprofit and government agencies administer the LIHEAP program in all 95 counties.

Extreme early summer temperatures have proven deadly to vulnerable Tennesseans, the elderly and small children. In June, two Shelby County men, ages 70 and 88, and one 47-year-old Memphis woman were found dead in separate incidents just days apart. The Department of Human Services' Adult Protective Services unit is stepping up efforts to check on vulnerable clients during these hot summer days, many of whom are hesitant to turn on their air conditioners in an effort to keep their energy bills low.

"More than half of our APS clients — 57 percent — are referred to DHS because of self-neglect," said Human Services Commissioner Gina Lodge. "These clients are most at risk for heat-related illnesses. Many of these individuals may be staying shut inside overheated homes. It is imperative that we, along with family and neighbors of our vulnerable citizens, help look out for these individuals."

LIHEAP agencies across the state are urging residents to seek assistance. In Knoxville, the Knoxville-Knox Community Action Committee is staying open until 6 p.m. and opening its main office on Saturdays to accommodate the public. In Davidson County, the Metro Action Commission is administering a summer cooling program by providing free air conditioners and fans to eligible residents.

Approximately 83,000 households benefit from LIHEAP assistance every year. The program, which has spent \$30 million so far this year, is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In addition to the income guidelines, eligibility for LIHEAP assistance is determined on a priority point system to target households with members who are elderly, disabled and/or under the age of six. LIHEAP assistance does not go directly to the client or applicant; rather direct payments are made through the LIHEAP agency to the local utility company or energy supplier.

To report possible abuse or neglect of an adult, call toll free 1-888-APS-TENN (1-888-277-8366).

For more information on the LIHEAP program and a list of LIHEAP agencies, visit:
<http://state.tn.us/humanserv/adfam/liheap/liheap-agencies.pdf>

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